

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell, December 22, 1891, with transcript

JOURNAL Beinn Breagh, C. B. December 22nd, 1891. Dec. 22nd, 1891 — Tuesday.

Last night — or rather early this morning when I went to take my bath — found water had ceased to run — something wrong. Mr. Martin unable to sleep for fear of another explosion in kitchen stove if pipes should freeze. Went out and investigated — so did Mr. Martin. Mr. Martin discovered that he had allowed water to run to prevent freezing — outside the house instead of inside. This prevented water pressure from reaching tank — and thus there was no overflow and circulation of water was stopped in house. Fortunately temperature not low enough to do damage. So great a flow had been allowed outside that storage reservoir on hill near lawn tennis court empty. Would take hours to fill. Water was not running properly today — until the afternoon — and the Martins were afraid of lighting kitchen fire — so we had cold meals until the trouble was over. Mr. Martin has now agreed to let the water-pipes alone outside the house and allow them to run inside. The poor man is quite upset by mishap. He has known for a day or two past that something was wrong with his management of the water — and he has been quite ill from anxiety — and fear of a blow up.

This accounts for the way he has been hopping out of the kitchen at the slightest noise — and his pale face and sleepless nights. Everything O. K. now. Water scare kept me awake nearly all night — breakfast at eleven. Had McInnis round examining water-pipe connections — found that my specific instructions not carried out at all and it will be difficult to prevent water-pipe outside freezing. My original instructions were to have the water cocks A. B. and a fire-hose in a little house where we could turn water on or off as desired. I find the cock A is at the exit of the pipe — and water then will freeze. Cock B too is in the cellar of the house out of reach perhaps in case of fire. No means of turning water on or off

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in the little house. The little house to protect the water cocks has no water cocks in it at all. You build a house to live in in winter and then live outside in the frost and snow!

I gave instructions — in writing — only a short time ago — to Mr. McInnis — to leave all water supply at the Ellis Cottage to be decided on in the spring — and told him specifically not to lay any pipe this year from the spring to the Ellis Cottage. I was so particular about this — that I had Mr. McCurdy write these instructions to him — before we left Baddeck. Yet during my absence — he had dug a trench and laid a water pipe on to the Ellis Cottage from the spring and when I arrived here I found eight or ten men at work on the frozen ground covering it up. The pipe goes up hill and down hill straight to the cottage — and goes in on the upper side of the house. Whole thing will probably have to come up again in the spring. Much annoyed and poor Mr. McInnis much troubled over matter. Due to a misunderstanding. In Boston — I told Mr. Ellis to lay water-pipe from spring on top of mountain — up to the shepherd's house — before frost came in 3 preparation for windmill expected to pump water for sheep. He translated this to Mr. McInnis as a direction — to get all water pipes under ground at once — and Mr. McInnis went ahead — although Mr. McCurdy reminded him of my written instructions to the contrary in relation to the Ellis Cottage.

He accepted the verbal message of Mr. Ellis instead of the written instructions I left. He won't do so again. He is quite distressed about the matter. Sorry for him — made up with him this evening — but he has been quite unhappy about it all day. In fact we have been all upset over water supply.

After a cold lunch — walked up mountain to see sheep. No progress today. Angus snared a beautiful white rabbit — and they expect a feast on the mountain.

Non-freezable water tank for use of sheep completed today — ready to be put in position on mountain. Mr. McInnis Instructed to purchase two large molasses hogsheads — to form

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tank for storage of water in barn on mountain. Windmill will pump water into hogsheads. Windmill purchased in Boston arrived O. K. but some parts of it not turned up yet.

Photograph stand for sheep completed and ready for trial. Closet in shepherd's house fitted with a red pane of glass — and arranged as a dark room for development of photos. Mr. McCurdy went to Baddeck after lunch — and telephoned that the photo of the nipples of the six-nippled sheep successful. He drove to Big Baddeck Falls upon business did not return till late tonight.

Important graphophone printing idea tried today with promising results — though not as successful as I had hoped.

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Took plaster mould — and placed inside it on ozok. cylinder closed at one end and having small hole at other. Half filled cylinder with mercury (quicksilver) heated to 200°F. Put on wooden and pieces — and rotated whole arrangement in lathe. It made 258 rotations per minute.

Heat of mercury kept ozok. soft — and centrifugal force threw mercury against inside of ozok. cylinder — pressing the plastic material against the plaster record.

We obtained a print in this way — and faint unintelligible articulation was obtained from the print — when rotated in graphophone afterwards. This method is very promising. The great weight of the mercury leads it to press the ozok. with considerable force against inside of plaster mould. Think we will be ask to work this process. Mr. Ellis, Mr. McInnis and I experimented until after 10 P. M.

Mr. McCurdy then came home starving and we talked over his trip. Saw his sister in town. Ladies Club met this evening. Good papers — interesting meeting. They passed a resolution asking the President to write to Mabel to wish her a happy New Year from

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the Club. Met at the Telegraph House — Mr. McCurdy saw his sister in town just after meeting. Club is to hold a public meeting Dec. 31st — and I am to be invited I hear.

Children's Club has also been in regular session. By the by I hear that the Khamein matter — led to the withdrawal of the whole Trenaine family from Club. None of them have been near it since — so says Mr. McCurdy. Have not seen Miss McCurdy yet.

After Mr. McCurdy went to bed — completed several tables of statistics relating to 1891 lambs. Seems equally balanced — 5 Out of 78 lambs born this year — 39 were males and 39 females. Also 39 were two-nippled — and 39 had extra nipples. 33 were twins and 45 single lambs. Of the twins 39 per cent had two nipples. 61 per cent had extra nipples (3 or 4 nipples) Of the single lambs 58 per cent had two nipples. 42 per cent had extra nipples. Of the two-nippled twins 23 per cent were males and 77 per cent females. Of the extra nippled twins 70 per cent males and 30 per cent females. Of the two-nippled single lambs 62 per cent were males and 38 per cent females. Of the extra nippled single lambs 32 per cent were males and 68 per cent females.

These results are very curious — but the absolute numbers are too small to be thoroughly relied upon for a percentage.

Telegram from Washington states that cablegram received from Mabel announces arrival of “Geneva” “Well — delightful.” Have prepared cablegram to be sent to Genoa — tomorrow morning. Tried to send it off this evening — but could not get Telegraph House — probably on account of meeting of Club.

Noted at B.B. Dec. 22nd, 1891. Alec.